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SUBJECT: MEPI ALGERIA SNAPSHOT: PSP ENGLISH TRAINING

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¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY: We saw the MEPI-funded Partnership Schools Program (PSP) in action recently in the western Algerian city of Sidi Bel Abbes as MEPI implementers provided training to a group of government language inspectors. The progress we saw, along with anecdotal evidence from participants, trainers and program managers, indicates that PSP is an effective component of our broader programming focus on English language training in Algeria. The history of PSP in Algeria shows the need for commitment to long-term projects (24 months or more) and patience to persevere through the Algerian bureaucracy, especially in the early stages of a program. With that commitment, however, we can have a positive impact on the education system here and provide a spectrum of technical assistance to the Algerian English language curriculum, an area that officials continually stress is a priority of the government. END SUMMARY.

PSP TRAINING EFL INSPECTORS

¶12. (U) The Partnership School Program (PSP) is our largest MEPI-funded program in Algeria. Started in late 2004 and implemented by Creative Associates, the program has three components: improving the quality of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction; using technology to create a more participatory curriculum; and creating linkages between U.S. and Algerian high schools. To assist the Ministry of National Education (MNE) expand EFL programming in Algeria, Creative Associates developed a "train the trainer" program that provides workshops to EFL program inspectors assigned in each wilaya (province). EFL inspectors are MNE employees responsible for supervising and training language teachers and developing the national examinations for both middle school and university students (the Brevet d'Enseignement Moyen (BEM) and the Baccalaureat de l'Enseignement Secondaire (BAC), respectively). Inspectors also have other administrative responsibilities across assigned regions. Since each inspector is responsible for the ultimate oversight of approximately 300 teachers in addition to their other duties, they are a particularly important demographic for this training.

¶13. (U) We went to Sidi Bel Abbes in western Algeria in June to observe the third phase of the ESL inspector training, which took place across the country. To date, 55 inspectors have been trained, and Creative Associates has awarded a sub-grant to World Learning/School for International Training to work with the MNE to create a performance-based curriculum and provide additional expertise to conduct the training.

CHALLENGES: JOINING THE 21ST CENTURY

¶14. (U) PSP, the first American-based long-term education

program in Algeria, faced significant start-up challenges, including the slow development of cooperative relationships at the education ministry and a lack of infrastructure at the center designated for e-training modules. PSP also had to decipher the Algerian education reform process to determine where best to fit its programming within the Algerian bureaucracy. It took an entire year before PSP could begin program activities on the ground; the first assessment was done in November 2004, and the first team began activities in January 2006.

¶15. (U) Although the MNE likes to claim that it is decentralized throughout the country, it is still very much a top-down bureaucracy. Departments within the ministry do not always communicate effectively with each other, causing delays in implementation of programs like PSP. In addition, PSP is only authorized to interact directly with the department of donor coordination, which means that it is fully reliant on that office to communicate program activities and directives to other departments in Algiers and across the country that are the primary stakeholders in the programming, such as the department of teacher supervision and training and the departments of secondary education and primary education. Implementers tell us that the department of donor coordination is understaffed and disorganized, hampering effective and consistent communication. Attention is often focused on a specific activity, with little reflection on strategic planning, program content or long-term sustainability.

¶16. (U) In 2005, the MNE announced the creation of an Information, Communications and Technology (ICT) Center for Education that would link all schools to the Internet and serve as a communication and information hub. Officials expected to have the capacity to house powerful servers to

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manage the education system, as well as to employ a staff able to create and adapt IT educational programs. The Center is still understaffed in 2009, both in terms of numbers and skills, and is unable to get the Internet connections needed for the servers to function. This has caused a particular challenge for PSP's eMath and School Linkages Programs. Despite the claim that all regional education directorates and high schools across the country would be equipped with Internet and computer labs, many inspectors and teachers in PSP's trainings were unable to gain access to on-line training modules.

SUCSESSES: REGIONAL BUY-IN

¶17. (U) Despite the challenges PSP faced getting started, the program has logged several significant successes, including an unexpectedly high level of regional and local commitment to the program and the development of professional networks. Through the School Linkages program, PSP trainers were able to train teachers that had never previously touched a computer and had difficulty integrating new technologies into their classrooms. Through follow-up evaluations, Creative Associates reported to us that many of the teachers they trained are now integrating ICT activities into their lesson plans and are adapting School Linkages activities for their students. The teachers trained through the EFL component of the program are now being asked to assist the inspectors in region-wide teacher training programs, amplifying the effect of these programs across the wilaya. We heard anecdotally of a school director in Setif applying one of the techniques he learned through PSP training throughout his school. We were also told that the wilaya of Ghardaia has continued the eMath program and expanded it to additional schools even absent ongoing MNE or MEPI funding.

¶18. (U) In conjunction with the inspectors themselves, PSP is developing tools to improve the teaching and learning of English throughout the education system. A comprehensive

inspector manual is in the final stages of development. It has been a collaborative effort involving the inspectors who participated in PSP trainings. By involving them in the drafting of the documents, PSP implementers hoped to give the inspectors a greater sense of ownership and pride in the finished product and hoped they would encourage the ministry to adopt the manuals for wide distribution. The attempt at buy-in seems to be working: during the training in Sidi Bel Abbes, we witnessed inspectors debating the finer points of their own competencies as well as reviewing a comprehensive list of teacher competencies. PSP implementers also told us that there has been a marked improvement in the inspectors' willingness to collaborate with one another since the beginning of the program. In fact, while planning the next workshops to occur in the autumn, inspectors rebelled at a suggestion that their group be split in order to facilitate logistics, insisting that they should continue working as a cohesive unit; a desire that may require additional financial and time resources for them.

¶9. (U) One of the ancillary goals of PSP has been to facilitate professional relationships between teachers and inspectors. During the teacher training program, teachers from Setif and Blida connected with each other for the first time via the Internet to share teaching strategies, and many have maintained contact over time. This has also happened among the EFL inspectors, who, we are told, have gained new insight into teamwork. PSP is creating a website called the EFL Virtual Learning Environment to continue fostering these networks. The website will have a list of helpful EFL sites, EFL documents to use and chat rooms for both inspectors and teachers.

ON THE HORIZON: PEDAGOGIC CURRICULUM

¶10. (SBU) MEPI awarded Creative Associates an additional USD 1 million to develop a program to work with the national teacher training colleges, the Ecoles Normales Supérieures (ENS), as well as selected universities, to improve the pedagogic curriculum used to train new EFL teachers. This program would collaborate with the Ministry of Higher Education (MHE) to evaluate and strengthen English language teacher education programs to reflect the current best practices in the field of modern language teaching. We facilitated a meeting between Creative Associates Field Manager Sarah Havekost and Arezki Saidani in the Office of Donor Coordination at the MHE in late June to present the MEPI-funded pedagogic proposal. Mr. Saidani expressed enthusiasm toward the project and hosted a second meeting

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within a week with representatives from a geographically diverse group of universities and teacher colleges. He also provided the documentation needed to begin the assessment phase of the program.

¶11. (U) Training for this program would be conducted throughout the 2009-2010 academic year in three two-week sessions, with an on-line component slated between each session. A total of 42 participants would be trained through the program, which builds on a broad theoretical understanding of modern foreign language teaching. The Algerian educational system, based on a French model, is often strong on theory but weak on practical application. Accordingly, this training would focus on translating education theory into practical training models for teachers to utilize over a career. The program would also enhance the skills of participants both as language teachers and as trainers of other foreign language teachers.

¶12. (SBU) Nacer Tou, Rector of Djillali Liabes University in Sidi Bel Abbes, told us at a meeting on July 22 with PSP's Havekost and several university staff that he hoped to expand EFL programs through engagement with either American or the British organizations. He had already approached the British

Council, which was reluctant to move forward, he said. Tou proudly spoke of his university's engagement with both the Spanish and the Germans to improve other foreign-language curricula. We described the MEPI-funded program's general terms, and Rector Tou said that he would discuss it with Mr. Saidani at the MHE.

¶13. (SBU) COMMENT: Rector Tou requested a meeting with us and the PSP representatives upon hearing that the Embassy had sent a representative to observe the PSP training in Sidi Bel Abbes. Foreign language instruction, especially English language instruction, is clearly a priority for Djillali Liabes University and other universities across Algeria, and we may be able to use the MEPI-funded pedagogic program with the MHE to create new partnerships with universities around the country as well as the ENS system. What we witnessed in Sidi Bel Abbes proved that, with a commitment to long-term project life-spans and the patience to persevere through the Algerian bureaucracy in the early stages, MEPI programs in EFL and teacher training can be effective in Algeria with a reach well beyond the capital.

¶14. (U) Tripoli minimize considered.
PEARCE